

Message Text

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TAGS: PGOV, SPOP, , PBOR, EI

SUBJ: FIANNA FAIL OBSTRUCTING REFORMS

SUMMARY: FIANNA FAIL PARTY, NOW THAT IT HAS MOVED TO OPPOSITION, HAS LAPSED INTO OBSTRUCTIONIST POLICY ON MOST REFORMS. CONSTITUTIONAL REVISION IS EFFECTIVELY BLOCKED; REFORM OF ANTI-CONTRACEPTION LAWS IS IN SERIOUS DANGER; AND PARTY IS DRAGGING FEET ON "RECOGNITION" OF NI STATUS. OBJECTIONS TO THESE MEASURES REFLECT BOTH NARROW PARTISAN CONSIDERATIONS AND REAL DIFFICULTY OF CHANGING PUBLIC ATTITUDES. HOWEVER GOOD THE EXCUSE, THE DELAYS IN NEEDED REFORM ARE OBSTACLES TO NORTH-SOUTH RECONCILIATION. END SUMMARY.

1. THE BIPARTISAN DAIL COMMITTEE ON CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW HAS BEEN HOLDING FREQUENT PRIVATE MEETINGS, OFTEN WITH PARTICIPATION OF NORTHERN POLITICIANS (ESPECIALLY SDLP MEMBERS). SOURCE WELL INFORMED ON COMMITTEE, HOWEVER, TELLS US THAT THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE PROGRESS AND MUCH BICKERING. MEETING MAY EVEN BE DOING MORE HARM THAN GOOD. BOTH PARTIES IN GOVERNING COALITION APPEAR SINCERE IN WANTING MAJOR CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM, BUT FIANNA FAIL OPPOSITION HAS BEEN NEGATIVE. BIGGEST PROBLEM IS MAJOR VIVION DE VALERA LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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(SON OF EX-PRESIDENT), WHO FEELS OBLIGED TO DEFEND CONSTITUTION

AUTHORED BY HIS FATHER IN 1937. WITH THIS ATTITUDE, THERE CAN BE LITTLE HOPE FOR MOVEMENT, AS 1937 CONSTITUTION IS FULL OF SECTARIAN PROVISIONS WHICH HINDER REFORM IN SOUTH AND IMPEDE PROGRESS TO NORTH-SOUTH RECONCILIATION. EVEN SDLP PRESENCE AT MEETINGS HAS NOT BEEN SUFFICIENT TO BREAK LOG JAM. IN PRIVATE, ALL SDLP MEMBERS URGE REFORM OF REPUBLIC'S CONSTITUTION, BUT THEY HAVE ADOPTED POLICY OF NOT TAKING SIDES IN POLITICAL STRUGGLES BETWEEN SOUTHERN PARTIES.

2. MAJOR CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM MAY THUS BE BLOCKED, SINCE GOVT IS NOT LIKELY TO RISK PUBLIC REFERENDUM AGAINST FIANNA FAIL OPPOSITION. GIVEN PARTY SPLIT, BEST RESULT THAT COULD BE HOPED FOR WOULD BE NARROW VICTORY, WHICH WOULD NOT BE HELPFUL IN REASSURING NORTHERNERS.

3. ANOTHER, COMPARABLE PROBLEM IS THAT FIANNA FAIL HAS STILL NOT CLARIFIED ITS ATTITUDE TOWARD SUNNINGDALE AGREEMENT, WHICH RECOGNIZES NI CONSTITUTIONAL STATUS. DECISION WILL HAVE TO BE TAKEN SOON, AND PROSPECTS ARE FAIR, SINCE FIANNA FAIL WILL NOT WANT TO BE BLAMED FOR SCUTTLING NI POLITICAL PACKAGE. ON THIS ISSUE, SDLP HAS SPOKEN FRANKLY TO FIANNA FAIL LEADERS. NEVERTHELESS, PARTY IS RAISING DOUBTS ABOUT SUNNINGDALE PARA 5, AND THERE IS SUBSTANTIAL GRASS-ROOTS PRESSURE AGAINST "RECOGNITION."

4. AS USUAL, CONTRACEPTION ISSUE IS POSING MOST HEATED OF ALL TEST BASES. SEVERAL FIANNA FAIL CONTACTS HAVE TOLD US PARTY MAY IMPOSE WHIP (VOTING DISCIPLINE) AGAINST BILLS AIMED AT LEGALIZING SALE OF CONTRACEPTIVES. SUCH AN ACTION BY OPPOSITION WOULD PLACE GOVERNMENT IN VERY DIFFICULT SPOT, AND MIGHT WELL ENSURE DEFEAT OF REFORM. ON ISSUE WHERE INDIVIDUAL CONSCIENCE IS INVOLVED, GOVERNING PARTIES WOULD LIKE TO ALLOW THEIR DEPUTIES "FREE VOTE," MEANING THAT EACH COULD VOTE IN ACCORDANCE WITH PERSONAL CONVICTION. THIS WOULD PROBABLY PRODUCE DAIL MAJORITY FOR REFORM, BUT ONLY IF FIANNA FAIL FOLLOWED SIMILAR PROCEDURE. IF FIANNA FAIL IMPOSES WHIP AGAINST REFORM, BILL WOULD NOT CARRY UNLESS GOVERNMENT ALSO IMPOSES PARTY DISCIPLINE. THIS, IN TURN, WOULD RAISE CONSCIENCE PROBLEMS FOR SOME FINE GAEL AND EVEN LABOR DEPUTIES. UNDER THIS KIND OF PRESSURE, GOVERNMENT IS ENGAGED

IN SOME WRIGGLING THAT MAY EXPOSE IT TO RIDICULE.
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SOURCE CLOSE TO GOI TELLS US, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT GOVT HAS ACTUALLY DRAFTED A BILL WHICH WOULD REQUIRE COUPLES TO PROVIDE MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE BEFORE BUYING CONTRACEPTIVES FROM DRUGSTORES.

COMMENT: REPUBLIC'S BIPARTISAN POLICY ON NI PROBLEMS IS STILL TECHNICALLY ALIVE BUT NO LONGER MEANS VERY MUCH. FIANNA FAIL OPPOSITION TO REFORMS IS VERY LIKELY TO GIVE NI PROTESTANTS

REASON TO BELIEVE THAT CATHOLIC SOCIETY, TAKEN AS A WHOLE, LACKS
WILL TO CROSS SECTARIAN DIVIDE. EVENTUALLY, OF COURSE, REFORMS
WILL COME, BUT PERHAPS NOT IN TIME TO EASE IRISH TENSIONS WHILE
THEY ARE AT THEIR WORST. TO BE FAIR, IRISHMEN OF BOTH "PERSUASIONS"
HAVE BEEN ASKED TO ACCEPT A LOT OF NEW THINKING IN PAST FOUR YEARS,
AND IT IS HARD TO CHANGE BASIC ATTITUDES SO QUICKLY. SITUATION
HERE WAS EASIER WHEN FIANNA FAIL -- THE MOST "REPUBLICAN" OF
MAJOR PARTIES -- WAS FORCED TO UPDATE ITS THINKING BY RESPONSI-
BILITY OF GOVERNMENT. IT WOULD BE MANY YEARS, HOWEVER, BEFORE
FIANNA FAIL IS BACK IN POWER, AND IRISH TROUBLES CANNOT WAIT SO
LONG FOR SETTLEMENT. MOORE

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